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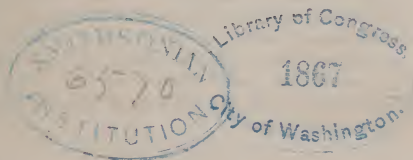


HAZAE L;

OR,

K N O W T H Y S E L F.

By REV. A. F. DICKSON,
CHARLESTON, S. C.



AMERICAN SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,

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CHAPTER I.

HAZAEI THE SYRIAN.

SETTING sail from Constantinople, threading our way among the thousand isles of the Archipelago, running along the green hill-sides of Cyprus, with our faces to the rising sun, let us land at that illustrious but miserable village of fishermen, once queen of the sea and mother of merchant princes,—TYRE. Having made our preparations for a land-journey, we cut across the low and rocky hills to the north, and ascend gradually as we go, until we find ourselves suddenly upon the edge of a precipice at whose base the famous river Leontes rushes onward to the sea.

Barren rocks surround us, with here and there a clump of cedars or a wild olive-tree; but the river below us is set in an enamelled frame of green and red; oleanders, pomegranates, and other flowering shrubs crowd along its brink, drink in its freshness and repay it with perfume.

Slowly we wind on and up, keeping and even in-

creasing our height above the river, till it makes but a faint murmur a thousand feet below us. Just where the valley of Lebanon begins to widen out of this wild pass and admit of cultivation, we turn our backs upon it. As so often happens in life, in labouring at one thing we have accomplished another: while keeping our place near the Leontes, we have climbed half the height of the Eastern Lebanon and entered its défiles. A fresher and more fragrant air begins to blow upon us; the tired horses mend their pace; the guides' songs grow heartier. At last they run forward, call us on with wild shouts, point through a sudden cleft in the rock to the plains below, and cry, "Behold Damascus!"

"The city, surrounded by its ramparts of black and yellow marble, flanked by its innumerable square towers, commanded by its forest of minarets of every form, and intersected by the seven branches of its river and numberless streams, extended as far as the eye could reach. It was a labyrinth of gardens and flowers, thrusting its suburbs here and there in the vast plain, encircled by a forest of thirty miles in circumference, and everywhere shaded by groves of sycamores and trees of every form and hue. Our eyes were bewildered, and only turned from one enchantment to fix on another.

"The vast and fruitful plain; the mystic framework of the mountains; the glittering lakes which

reflect the heaven upon the earth; its geographical situation between the seas 'and among the deserts;' the perfection of the climate: every thing indicates that Damascus has at least been one of the first towns that were ever built by the children of men,—one of the natural halts of fugitive humanity in primeval times."*

Damascus is, and for ages has been, the boast and wonder of the desert-world, teeming with manufactures, princely in commerce. No city now inhabited is known to equal it in age; none in Western Asia can vie with it for population. For beauty of situation, for intelligence and industry of the people, for architecture, for wealth, for display of magnificence in private life, it is unique among Eastern cities,—a very queen among the nations. Like all Oriental cities, the houses of Damascus are built with a blind wall upon the street, pierced by a single gateway; but, if you enter there, it is to be enchanted among scenes which we are apt to think can only be found in Persian or Arab fable. Fountains, piazzas, statues, columns, tropical shrubs and trees, walks paved with rich mosaic, gilding and carved work, lavish illusion and dream upon you, and banish thought of the bigotry, oppression, and miserable vice, which dwell without.

* Lamartine.

DAMASCUS is the capital of one large province of the vast country called Syria,—a country whose southern border touched the land of Palestine, whence it stretched northward indefinitely five or six hundred miles. It was broken up into many petty principalities, which were sometimes fused into kingdoms, and then fell apart again when the temporary bond, whatever it was, was broken. Syria of Damascus, as it was called, was the richest and most powerful division of Syria,—rich in its own resources, powerful in the sway it held over all the neighbouring provinces. At the time of which I am to speak, Benhadad II. reigned in Damascus, the regular descendant and lawful heir of him who restored its independence after the conquest by David, narrated in 2 Sam. viii. Thirty and two kings were subject to him; and nowhere, nearer than Assyria, was there a monarch he need fear. Only the interference of God saved the Israelites and Jews from his power; thrice He discomfited him and drove him back when all human help was vain.

It was after this third defeat that Hazael appeared upon the stage, whose history, so far as we have it in the Scriptures, I propose to recall for the sake of some lessons that may be drawn from it. It parts naturally into three periods:—his life before his interview with Elisha, that interview itself, and the following events.

We find Hazael an attendant on the king of Syria and a confidential servant, and, therefore, according to the habits of the East, a man of power, a kind of menial minister of state. If he had been a relative of Benhadad, the custom of all chroniclers in those days assures us it would have been mentioned; but there is not a trace of any claim he had to eminence except the favour of his king. No doubt he had been raised from the ordinary estate of life there, had been found useful, and rewarded for his services.

And, though this may seem a thing incredible to us, it is a very common occurrence in Oriental despotisms. The queen and prime minister of Peter the Great of Russia both rose from among the populace. Mohammed Pacha, tyrant of Egypt, whose threatening power overshadowed Constantinople and filled the hearts of its inhabitants with fear, was an Arab undistinguished for birth or wealth till he won the latter and made the other needless by his ferocious courage and robberly skill. Then he sold his services to the patron of all robbers in Turkey,—the sultan,—till he achieved Egypt and independence. Indeed, the spirit of those despotisms is hostile to any hereditary claims of power and noble rank except in the monarch himself.

The door of preferment and fame was thus open to all the young men of Syria; and among these some

quality distinguished Hazael. What it was we are not explicitly informed; but his subsequent history and the character of his master leave no doubt that his first pre-eminence was in war. Courage, energy, personal strength, military combination, pointed him out as fit to be captain in the king's host. Thus brought near the king himself, other qualities were seen in him and appreciated; he became a *favourite*, and showed himself not unworthy of the kindness done him. So he was advanced to the position of confidential officer and household companion,—the last position of eminence below the level of the throne. He was not only intrusted with important duties and powers and sent as the king's own representative on such affairs as the message to Elisha, but, as the history shows, he was allowed to remain in Benhadad's private apartment alone with him. He had thus earned the utmost confidence of the king; all that was required in a royal favourite—a good general, a chief ruler, a confidential friend—had been found in him. Hazael, therefore, was *a man of many virtues*.

Now, does anybody demur to this, and exclaim against such a prostitution of the noble name virtue as giving it to the good qualities of a man who afterwards proved himself a traitor, murderer, and tyrant? But, I ask, are not energy, personal daring, lavish generosity, intellectual strength, faithfulness in ser-

vice, industry and honourable feelings,—are not these counted virtues to-day and among ourselves? And what is the matter with Syria, that they should not be virtues there? But do you say that Hazael's conduct afterwards vitiates all these things and proves that in him, at least, they were not virtues? Then I ask if you are not applying to him a test you would refuse for yourself? Do we wait till people die, before we decide whether their generosity, courage, and industry, are virtues or not?

But perhaps you will say, "We see now what all his sacrifices, toils, and risks, were meant for; he was just working his way up to the crown." Were all his excellencies superficial and hollow, because you think you detect a selfish purpose under them? I am afraid you are as uncharitable as ministers in their preaching, or even the Bible itself. Why may not the evil purpose have sprung up late in life? Here is a man,—a heathen, too, and labouring under many disadvantages which you and I know nothing about,—frank, generous, brave, risking his life, time and again, to swell the greatness of his country and consolidate the power of his king: why may he not be an unselfish, devoted patriot? Why not believe that he cared nothing for power or fame?—in truth, was very unwilling to reign, but felt himself constrained by the necessities of the times, and sacrificed his comforts, his plans,

and his friendship, to the good of his fellow-men?

Do you exclaim, "Impossible! this wicked world does not produce such characters; men here set aside the welfare of others to make way for their own. Hazael must have been selfish and hard-hearted all along"? Is that your feeling? Why, so says the Bible of us all:—"They go astray as soon as they are born:" (Ps. lviii. 3;) "*the Scripture hath concluded all under sin:*" Gal. iii. 22.

Do you say there is a deep moral consistency in man's character and heart, so that, whenever an unequivocal display of it is made, you are entitled to read his life backwards and interpret all by that? And what if God should read our lives backwards and interpret the graces and virtues of to-day by the evil unveiled in us at the judgment?

Will you say now, "No doubt, if we knew more of Hazael's life, we should detect many crimes and vices in it"? I answer, his character was high, and his confidence in it strong. "Is thy servant a dog, to do this thing"? Does he speak like a craven and a self-convicted villain? But, suppose it were so, as without question it was: which of us could invite that test of our virtue? Whose secret history would bear perfect exposure? Who could see every thought and feeling and silent purpose and hasty deed laid bare without shame?

What can be said for sinners now that cannot be said for Hazael, except this one thing,—that his exposure came in this life? Are they loved and trusted? So was he. Have they fine and noble qualities? So had he. Have they wrought out great results for others? So had he. Do they love their good name? So did he. Are they strong in good resolutions? So was he. Do you resent this comparison with such a man? It shall be withdrawn, at once and forever, if you will prove any other substantial difference than that I have named. Meanwhile, remember that the standard by which his crimes and our characters are to be judged is not the gross appearance, but the secret motive and the disobedience of heart. Will it be strange if human judgments are *there* reversed?—if Hazael takes rank above the Pharisee, and the criminal condemns the judge?

We come now to Hazael's interview with Elisha. The daring king Benhadad, who had attempted the life of the prophet a few years before, not only in despite of his supernatural gifts, but even because of them,—because God had shown him what the king of Syria meant to do and he had declared it to the king of Israel,—this audacious king, like many other such, lost courage when he was sick. He sent to his old enemy, the prophet, who was even then in

Damascus at the command of God, to know if he should recover; and his messenger was this same Hazael. It was an impressive scene.

Elisha, as a traveller and foreigner, lodged, no doubt, at the khan or caravanserai, which in Eastern countries takes the place of our inns. A foot-traveller, and having no merchandise to occupy room, he may well have been crowded back and concealed in the throng that gathers in such a place. But, like his master in later days, "he could not be hid;" and the procession of horsemen, followed by forty camels bearing the king's present, entered the central court, sought him out, and paid the tribute of paganism to the mighty God of Israel.

Then followed a conference, probably a private one, between the prophet and the prince. "Thy son Benhadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?" And Elisha answered, "Go say unto him, Thou *mayest* certainly recover; howbeit," he adds to Hazael, "the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die." And he gazed significantly and steadily upon the traitor's face, showing him that his inmost secret thought was known. Then, when his manifest confusion brought full proof of his guilty purpose, the man of God wept, foreseeing the disasters that would fall on Israel from his iron hand.

Now, mark, this resolute traitor and assassin, self-

convicted and ashamed when the crime he has determined to commit is referred to, grows indignant as any man of honour when other deeds are predicted of him. He dares not deny that he will slay his benefactor in his sleep; but that he will war with the Jews, sack their cities, and crush their people!—oh, horrible! Is he a dog, that he should do this thing? The blacker villany he owns to himself, and denies not to the prophet; but its accessory and certain consequence he vows shall never come.

Must he not have practised some gross fraud upon himself in this matter? By what arguments he had justified himself in his own eyes for resolving to take his sovereign's life we are not informed. Perhaps he accused Benhadad, in his thoughts, of being too prodigal of his people's wealth and blood, and imagined it was due to his country to end so dangerous a life. This would suit well with his resenting the charge of war and cruelty made by the prophet. But then, must he not have thought, "Though all the tribes, and the army itself, should rise against him, yet could not I, his servant and friend, who owe every thing to his hand"? But perhaps he saw that his day of power was waning; that his pre-eminence was already disputed by some new favourite, and would soon be over; perhaps, spoiled child of fortune as he was,

he fancied himself slighted or wronged, and entitled to revenge. At any rate, he had conjured up some strong arguments, which, though they could not keep him from being "ashamed" before Elisha, yet, conned over and enlarged upon by a fierce and eager heart, prepared him to do murder on the morrow. Thus the great crime, black ingratitude and treachery, looked trifling to him, while its inevitable consequence seemed monstrous and impossible.

And are there no Hazael's in these days? Not in the specific crime, but in the wonderful self-delusion. Do we not every day see men thrown by their passions, or, by the swift treachery of evil habit into crime which, beforehand, they would have recoiled from as indignantly as Hazael?

But the chief point is not the risk of these offences, great though that be. It is this:—these smaller transgressions are involved in a greater crime, which has been committed by every impenitent sinner; yet he forgets that or sees little of it, while he feels shame or indignation at the mention of the others. We, too, have a Benefactor,—a friend of almost incredible love and faithfulness. "Scarcely for a righteous man would one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man, some would even dare to die; but God commendeth *his* love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." How, impenitent reader, how have you treated

that dear Friend? Have you not practically disowned him? Have you not continually disobeyed him? If all his subjects were like you, would he not be virtually dethroned? If he were to appear,—I cannot say, to *come*, for he is here!—if he were to appear and say, Where is mine honour with thee? what could you answer him? He has offered you royal bounties and his own home; and you have deigned him no other answer than is found in the conduct which rejects his offer. Thus have you insulted and rebelled against the mighty King of heaven, your patient Benefactor, your self-sacrificing Redeemer! An act of cruelty, of revenge, of dishonesty, is shameful, no doubt; but how does it compare for malignity with this sin of sins?

Has it had its proper share of your remorse? Has the thought of this supreme offence, UNGODLINESS, taken the first rank among your regretful thoughts and deepened them into repentance? Or do you receive the accusation of it carelessly and reserve your feeling for other charges? Hazael no doubt said to himself, “I have resolved to kill my kind master and lawful king; I am a traitor; I shall be a murderer: but I have not invaded Israel, nor slain her women in the streets.” And he found comfort in the thought. And just so sinners say, “True, I am an outlaw as regards God; I disobey him incessantly; I reject his offers; I grieve his

Spirit; I dishonour his Son who died for me: but then I am an honest man and a good citizen." And they find comfort in that thought!

Let us now consider the events in Hazael's life that followed his interview with Elisha. He persevered in his faithlessness and murder, no more driven from his sin than men are now by the thought, "Thou, God, seest me!" He was as accomplished in resisting heaven's warnings and hardening his heart as sinners are to-day; *and no more*.

It was noon; and the king slept heavily, as sick men sleep, in his palace of Damascus. No eye was on him but the cruel eye of his servant and the vigilant eye of God. Neither his present helplessness nor his past kindnesses could move Hazael's heart of stone; care for man and fear of God were nought against envy, malice, and ambition. "And it came to pass that he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water and spread it on his face." Without a warning or a prayer Benhadad went from the embrace of sleep to the agony of death. Hazael "murdered sleep," and reigned in the king's stead.

Having consolidated his power in the few following years, Hazael stretched forth his hand to vex Israel and Judah. He was bought off once by Jehoash at enormous cost; but soon afterwards, for their sins, the people of Israel were given into his hands,

and he oppressed them all his days, according to the word of the Lord. But the central point of this last division of his life is, that *he met no punishment in this life for any of his crimes*. He was victorious in war; he kept the conquered nations under him to the last; he founded a dynasty, and transmitted an unbroken power to his son; and he died quietly in his bed.

Now the question arises, and *will* have an answer, Does God govern the world upon a system, or not? Is it mere hap-hazard and blind chance whether an offender against all law is condemned and executed, or not? Can you and I, allowing for and excepting accidental disasters in this life, live as we list here, defy eternal justice, and dwell in heaven forever in spite of it? Say what you will of remorse and the pains of an accusing conscience, of which there is not a trace in the history, no man in his senses will affirm that such complicated crimes were atoned for by a run of almost unexampled prosperity here and perfect impunity and everlasting blessedness hereafter.

Man instinctively recognises God as a Moral Governor. It is a necessity of his own spiritual nature; and, though he may tremble at the thought when himself is the criminal; though, driven by love of sin and fear of woe, he may then deceive himself; only take him from the dock, and he in-

terprets the law and gives the sentence in the very echo of God's thunder.

"Hazeal"—says every man's conscience and sense of right—"Hazeal has sinned and must die." Why? *Why?* O perishing men, does it not chill your very heart to think why his fate is so sure? Because "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." There is a God,—a being of principle and firm character; not a sentimental or capricious autocrat, but a king. The world beyond the grave is his, as this is; and what is not completed here will be finished there. Like the sea, which takes two continents in its arms, his purposes embrace two worlds and forever hem us in. Yea, though we take the wings of the morning and flee upon them, at the last we shall be face to face with God the Lord!

There, what will plausible excuses avail us? What safety can we find, what plea offer, out of Christ? For it is not a short-lived, excited feeling we have to fear in him: it is the beauty of Jehovah's holiness, his unchangeable truth and justice. Dear reader, there is but one shelter from the iron terror of his wrath; and that is his own love!

We see in this history that, in respect to moral character, the difference between sin and holiness is the only radical difference among men, and that all other moral distinctions are superficial and vain.

Common sense and law agree in treating the *intention* or *spirit* of an action as the essence of it. If you try a forger, it is for uttering such a note, *knowing the same to be forged*; a murderer, you accuse him of killing such a man at the instigation of the devil *and with malice aforethought*. So it is the spirit of a good deed you honour in it. Suppose it were proved to everybody's conviction that Washington, in fighting for his country, was moved by no lofty, pious patriotism, but by the same passion which drove Arnold to betray it,—blind, mad revenge! Would another course of stone be laid upon his monument? Would it not stand there, frustrate and dismantled, the monument of his shame? Surely, then, surely, God, the Searcher of hearts, will judge by the spirit of our deeds—both of our offences and our virtues. If he find in the most trifling offence a deep-set, malignant, rebellious wilfulness, he will punish *that*, and not the trivial instance of it. If he find in our boasted virtues no thought of him, but self-gratification and subservience to custom, *he will scorn them as worthless*.

But you will demand the proof,—and you have a right to it,—the proof that the difference between sin and holiness is a radical difference. It lies in the principle I have just laid down. The *spirit* of the two is radically different. Compare the worlds they monopolize and the beings in whom they are

perfected:—angels with devils, saints in light with lost souls. In that dark world, *self* reigns; no glorious Supreme bends every knee in adoration and melts every heart in love. In heaven, Love reigns; not a thought or will rebels; no murmur of opposition jars upon the mighty concord.

In this imperfect and probationary world it is enough that the seminal principles are here; that they spring up and grow; that each, where it prevails, gradually crowds out the opposing principle *and takes eternal possession of the heart.*

I do not wonder that impenitent men oppose and hate this doctrine: it is a most bitter and humiliating one. It says to every such man, “There is nothing in you that deserves to be called *good*. The virtues you take pride in may do for this poor world, where even they are rare; but they are worth nothing for any other. God takes no pleasure in the best of you; while, among your neighbours and servants, those you look down upon may be his dear children. More: if you will ever be forgiven, you must cease to admire and rely upon these idle vanities and shows of goodness; you must confess your terrible sinfulness, and trust in Christ alone.” No doubt this cuts men’s pride; but *is it true?* I speak to your own knowledge and your own consciences; IT IS TRUE. The Bible declares it, and the Bible is the word of God.

Will you risk your eternity on the question whether or not this principle is true? I will. I do. I stake my hopes of heaven and infinite bliss on *this*:—"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." If you deny the doctrine, you stake your all upon its falseness. If you are no sinner, no Christ died for you, no Bible speaks to you, no heaven opens for you, no God forgives and calls and welcomes you. Will you have it so?

Will you stand up before men and angels and their God, and defy him to find out your sin and condemn you for it? Will you say, "Come what will,—the last trumpet, the risen dead, the crushed and burning world, the Mighty Judge,—I am clear of guilt, I challenge a verdict"? Dare you?

If not, oh turn and love the Lord your Rock to-day; cry aloud to Christ, your faithful Redeemer; put your trust in him, confessing your sins! The strife, the agony, the peril, shall all be past,—fled away like a cloud!

CHAPTER II.

GOD OR BAAL?

(1 Kings xviii.)

THERE could hardly be a more striking proof than this history affords of the truth so often asserted,—that religion does not fear investigation. If there was a rival of Israel's God to be dreaded,—if there were claims upon man's reverence formidable enough to be kept studiously out of sight,—that rival was Baal and those claims were his. Beginning in Phenicia and sweeping north and south round the whole land of Palestine, the worship of Baal spread like a sea over the vast kingdoms of Asia. Assyria, Media, Persia, Babylon, all bowed before him. The most gorgeous trophies of war adorned his temples; the finest arts of peace were the handmaids of his magnificence; the greatest of earthly kings trembled with fear of his wrath, and the learning of the world was in the keeping of his priests. His generals, his armies, had conquered the nations, fighting in his name and offering incense to win his favour. The "peculiar people" of

Jehovah had fallen before their prowess in war, and opened their traitorous hearts freely to take his kingdom in.

Slowly and steadily his victory went on. The Temple in Zion was deserted; the law almost lost from among men; the single faithful prophet hunted through all lands, King Ahab taking an oath from every people that he was not among them; while four hundred prophets of Baal sat at Jezebel's table, and four hundred and fifty held their filthy orgies in Jehovah's realm.

So fast had the Mosaic religion faded from among men that God told Elijah, as a *consolation*, of the seven thousand out of all those millions who had not bowed the knee to Baal! Victory had truly perched upon the banners of this terrible "lord:" a faith not strengthened by God would have shrunk from any comparison of Jehovah's claims with his, until the tide had somewhat turned. But Elijah flinched not; gathering together all Israel unto Carmel, he challenges them to decide freely who is the God, and to follow him. The issue of the contest we all know: the false god was defeated and disgraced, and his prophets slain.

We are invited by it to a similar decision: it is the duty of every man to choose between the conflicting claims of God and the world on his heart and life.

Here a question of importance arises at once:—In what sense can the sinner be said not to have decided? To answer it, let us look back to the case of Elijah. How could the Jews be described as “halting between two opinions,” when the whole nation, from Dan to Beersheba, from king to peasant, was bowing the knee to Baal, and the Lord’s prophet could find no rest for the sole of his foot?

Plainly, because some inconsistency in their conduct or their feelings betrayed the incompleteness and crudeness of their views. There were features of the Jew in the life of the Gentile; proud nationalities, assuming the greatness of Jehovah, defaced by superstitious greediness after the empty favour or sensual rites of other gods; noble principles, inherited only to be belied and nullified by the wicked customs they borrowed. In short, the Scripture account of the later Samaritans applies to them also:—“They *feared* Jehovah, and *served* other gods:” 2 Kings xvii. 33. They remembered and revered the power of their own God, the God of Jacob, of Abraham, of Moses, Jehovah of hosts; but they craved the seducing idolatries of the pagans.

It was plainly impossible to reconcile the two. If Baal, Moloch, and Ashteroth were worth a thought,—if they deserved an instant’s respect or attention, a bowing of the head or a turning of the hand,—then

Jehovah was no God at all,—not the equal of the poorest idol in their train. If the long procession of six hundred years, the willing captives of his power, bearing their inestimable tribute of miracle and prophecy to his feet,—if these were no true witnesses, then the gods of the heathen were gods, and He a vanquished usurper. Was he the all-seeing, Almighty Redeemer? then were they utterly false and evil, at once the creatures and the tyrants of man.

Shutting their eyes hard against these plain truths, the children of Israel offended God with hollow worship, and betrayed their chosen patrons by their unsteady allegiance. They wore the chains of both, and kept the favour of neither. Their “halting,” then, lay in their attempting to combine the incompatible,—the service of God with bondage to idols.

The indecision and inconsistency of the sinner, now, are not far to seek.

It lies not in any uncertainty of knowledge in the matter; there is no wide or general difference of opinion as to the rightful claimant of man’s obedience and faith, the nature of the inducements offered us on either side, or the duty that devolves upon us all under the circumstances. On these points the impenitent not only do not plead ignorance, but they would repel the charge indignantly

if it were made. They boast as clear a knowledge as the Christian's who is the true God, what law and what gospel he has given, and how men may be saved. Nay, they prize it as a proud inheritance that they belong to a Christian nation,—*i.e.* a nation which admits the supremacy of Jehovah and the truth of his word. They look down with a pity partaking of contempt upon the most enlightened and philosophical of the pagans.

Thus far, then, the case is plain: not only is their knowledge abundant, but *it all tends one way*; the mind decides the whole question,—admits the validity of God's claim upon their love, and of Christ's upon their faith.

Nor is it that the course of sinners' lives is not uniform and resolute. Just as clearly as the head has decided for Jehovah, just so entirely has the heart chosen the god of this world. That fountain varies not; no alternation of sweet and bitter waters there! Trace the sinner's life from the first hour of moral action until now, and see if you can detect an ebb and flow in it,—even a temporary turning back of the flood. It changes in depth, in strength, in shade, but never in direction.

Sometimes it flows calmly on, so cured of all its turbulence and mischief that the unthinking are cheated into pleasant hopes and admiration, not knowing that it is for lack of opposition, until

Providence, or law, or some conflicting passion, throws a barrier across its bed: then see how the waters toss and boil and roar till the overmounting current sweeps headlong on its way again. Sometimes it gathers in deep, dark, stagnant volume, as if to flow no more, only because it is so near its final level: sooner or later it must enter that restless, shoreless sea to which it has tended so long. *But be sure of this*;—only He who held back the Jordan when he overflowed all his banks till the waters stood up like a wall; only He who divided the Red Sea before the rod of Moses, can say to that tide of worldliness and self-will, “Turn back and serve me,” and be obeyed. We find the heart decided as well as the mind.

But here we come upon the answer to our question:—These two decisions are directly contrary to each other,—can in no way be reconciled together. The decision of the head is that God is the Maker, Preserver, and King of all the earth; that of the heart is that self must be gratified and the world obeyed whatever he may claim. God declares his right to the whole affection of the man, and to that more earnestly than to any other part of him; reason, conscience-bound, admits his right and reaffirms his claim, but the heart resolutely withholds the entire treasure from him.

On the other hand, the will craves and insists on

enjoying the pleasures of sin and self-indulgence; reason loudly and steadily proclaims that sin and self are bad masters,—blind and foolish now, cruel and deadly at the last. The heart, and that slave of the heart, the life, put the highest value on good things attainable here,—pleasure, power, fame, wealth; experience and truth avow them to be short-lived, deceitful, and poisonous.

And, to make the inconsistency more glaring, the decision of the head works out into professions and conventional forms of one sort and another, while the heart's decision governs all that remains of life. The impenitent man comes to the house of God on the Sabbath; abstains, in part or wholly, from labour on that day; treats the minister of the gospel and the professing Christian with some respect; speaks of his "esteem" for religion, his "belief" that the Bible is God's word, even his pleasure in hearing that sinners are converted. Why all these tokens of regard for God from men who shrink not from profanity or breaking the Sabbath by amusement, or who cast off fear and restrain prayer, or who at least, however externally moral they may be, are keeping back from Jehovah *the hearts* he demands? Why, I say, these tokens of regard for a system of religion which, if their lives be in any wise conformed to truth and religion, must be utterly false and hollow, at once the idlest and most arrogant of impostures?

Manifestly, there are two conflicting "thoughts" in such hearts, and they go "halting" between them.

Another thing must be noted here. Neither of these decisions has been made with that deliberateness, that thorough and resolute courage, which the importance of the case demands. When God says, "Choose ye," "Let us reason together," he invites *the whole man* to the business,—he means no less than that the truth shall be earnestly sought, resolutely adhered to and obeyed. So momentous a question should never be decided by a few heedless and hollow professions on one side and a sidelong, unconscious, unresisted bias on the other. No; it behoves us to collect all our powers, to strip ourselves of every prejudice, to refuse attention to any temptation, to give earnest heed to all worthy evidence, and to stand up manfully for truth and right when the case is closed.

Let me ask you now, impenitent reader, when you have ever treated the matter in this way? Is not this, on the contrary, the very thing you have been staving off all your days, ever since the gospel was first preached to you,—a solemn, earnest, brave examination of your duty on the subject of religion? When the truth began to grow pungent and awakening to you and your hearts were a little moved, did not your farm, or your merchandise, or some domestic affair, suddenly engross your

thoughts? or some fault of minister or church-member, or some wrong done you by a neighbour, irritate you strangely? or politics or science acquire a new and wonderful importance in your eyes?

It is, therefore, not unfairly or without good grounds that I call urgently upon my impenitent readers to decide this question now *for the first time*.

But why are we bound to decide it at all? Why not let it alone? Other and more pleasant matters invite us: why must this unwelcome theme be forced upon us?

In the first place, because such great interests depend on your decision. If mammon is the true God, then whatever reverence you feel for him whom the Bible calls God, whatever respect for ministers of the gospel, whatever pleasure in hearing that sinners, as we call them, are converted, is utterly misplaced,—a waste of your best affections. Your precious hours spent in churches have been lost to you from their proper employment of pleasure or gain; the money bestowed on Sunday-schools, ministers, missionaries, Bibles, is mere extravagance. The solemnity and fear that sometimes steal over you when you reflect that you are a transgressor of a holy law and a sinner against God's blessed gospel,—that fearful looking-for of fiery indignation which will not down at your bidding,—is sheer super-

stition. All the vicious pleasure from which conscience or early instruction has kept you is so much clear loss, balanced by no advantage hereafter.

But if Jehovah be God, then godliness is the only wisdom, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come: then vice and amiable sin are crimes, these are madness. Then the only hours that can be redeemed from destruction and waste must be redeemed by thought and prayer and repentance,—by faith, by charity, by holiness. Then all deviations from the life that pleases God are a loss of the only things worth possessing,—a clear conscience, a good hope, and his friendship.

In the second place, whichever claimant of you is in the right will hold you accountable in the end. Is it against the god of this world you are sinning? He will never forgive you the homage you daily do to a Being he would dishonour and dethrone. How his thorough-going subjects will revile your timid allegiance, that failed to get the good of either kingdom by temporizing with both!

But if it is God's law you are breaking,—if he is king and you are a rebel against him,—then *the Bible is true*, and woe, woe, woe, awaits you! It is his labour, old as time, to make this dark world a paradise, that you thwart. It is his earnest wish to make men righteous that light may fill the earth for them,

which you deny him. It is his just right you withhold from him, Almighty though he be; and, though you were the highest archangel, you must die the second death. If he is the Most High God, then it is perilling your eternal life to trifle with his jealousy an hour.

Here, then, is abundant reason for deciding this question: your weightiest interests here are at stake; and the rightful claimant of your heart, whoever he be, will hold you guilty if you neglect him.

But you ask, "When must we decide?" Now. Not a day can you waste. In justice to the true God and to yourselves, you must choose *now* whom you will serve.

In justice to yourselves. Every argument for deciding at all is a reason for instant action; for you know not that you will ever have another opportunity. Every day brings you warnings that life is of all possessions the most precarious, that reason may be unseated and deposed, that some strong delusion may seize upon a man, which, whether it be ruin, as the Christian believes, depends upon the previous question, "Who is the true God?" but which will forever prevent his deciding the question freely and fairly. Notice, too, that the least reflective of your two decisions, and therefore the most suspicious one, is the very one that always strengthens

as life goes on; that is the one which effectually ripens into habit and shuts the other out from every thing but empty professions.

Remember that life is full of deeds; that unwearied memory is gathering up her stores of woe or glory every day; that, during these years of indecision and "halting," either your professions are laying up shame for you, or your life is a very treasury of remorse. Consider how your rightful sovereign must look upon this long delay in conceding what is his,—your whole heart. Reflect that there is such a thing—your nature proves it, and your spirit cries out for it—as a high and perfect blessedness attainable on one system or the other, but not on both, and that you risk it all by every hour of delay.

In justice to Him who has a right to reign over you, you must not put off the decision. The great and blessed God has that right; and to refuse obedience is wrong, infinitely wrong. Think of all the Bible denunciations of sin, of Satan, of the course of this world, of impenitent men, and justify yourself, if you can, in your professions of respect for Scripture and religion if those charges are unjust. Look at the foul and bitter implications and practical accusations on the other side, the acted assertions that God is a hard and unreasonable master and his service bondage, the unceasing mockery of

his word, the bold profanation of his name on the lips of levity, of vice, of wrath, and ask yourself, in the name of common fairness and justice, whether, if he be sacred or good at all, he does not deserve instant vindication, homage and service at your hands?

Ought not He whose rights have been compromised, whose laws have been broken, whose authority has been despised,—ought not he to receive at once all the support of your voice and to be enthroned in your loyalty? The language that the prophet of the Lord addressed to the perverse and backsliding children of Israel may be not less appropriately addressed to you:—

“A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master:
If then I be a father, where is mine honour?
And if I be a master, where is my fear?”*

A moment's reflection must convince you that you have not rendered to God your Creator the honour which is his due, nor has his fear been in your heart and before your eyes.

Nor can you take refuge from these arguments in your littleness and insignificance. You have no right to call your share in the matter unimportant, especially while you are living uniformly by one of the two systems, and *that one* of them which your

* Malachi i. 6.

intellect rejects and your professions denounce. Every spirit that lives has a right to your support if he is right, and ought to be opposed if he is wrong. Besides, you are wielding a very powerful weapon on the side you practically sustain,—*your influence*. Though it can compel none to follow you, it may be, and often is, the last weight in the balance, and decides the life, the death, the eternity of immortal souls. If it should prove, then, that your reason was right in condemning the system on which you live, your course will have been eminently unjust to others as well as ruinous to yourself; for you have decided the vacillating and encouraged the resolute in wrong, and you have enfeebled and tempted the right. And these consequences are rapidly slipping out of your hand; falling into that unchangeable world where they await you, where your fate will be sealed.

Now we have reached the all-important question:—What shall be the grounds of our decision? I answer, The fitness of either power to be our king, as shown by their history, their character and their purposes.

On these points I have a right to draw upon your own knowledge for evidence. You know, then, that God made the world by a word, and that the riches

of his might are boundless; that it spreads around you, pervading immensity, giving life to all, guiding the stars upon their courses, and holding all things in place by the overwhelming strength of his will; that, on the other hand, Satan is God's rival nowhere but in the wicked heart of man, but is a rebel creature, as man is; that your sin, the more direct contestant with God for your heart, is only *self*, and lives but by his sufferance. Which, then, can bless the universe, if he will?—God, who made all things, and who showers all good things on you,—life, friends, reason, affections, a Saviour, a sanctifying Spirit,—or the “servant of sin”?

You know that God's whole nature is told in one word,—Love. Love made the flying planets deck the sky, and furnished them with beauty as a home for his creatures. Love gave the life-blood to bound in your veins, and breathed the breath of life on all the angels. Love proclaimed that noble and holy law which bound the whole kingdom together and to its king with the golden links of purity, affection, and peace. Love rose indignant on the throne of majesty when that law was broken and spurned, yet refused to slay us. Love came down in pity to the lost province, was made flesh, lived, prayed, died, for men! Love has built the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, and has thrown wide the gates of everlasting bliss

that the redeemed of the Lord may come in and live forever.

Shall I pause now to tell you the character of sin? How it tore one planet from its place in heaven and made it the gate of eternal woe? How it poisoned the blood of man, and brought sickness and crime and death into his fair domain? How it steeled the hearts of God's dearly-loved children against him, and sowed the seeds of discord, blasphemy, and despair? How it so maddened the hearts of the rebels that, when God would not slay, they have leaped in successive myriads the precipice of death into the bottomless pit? How—well may our hearts sicken at the recollection!—How it seized Incarnate Love himself, and made us crucify our Saviour? How it has followed up that last remedy for man's ruin with remorseless enmity, blinding him to it with unbelief and pride,—yea, corrupting it with base inventions, and making it the very engine of death and hell?

You know, too, the purposes of each. You know that God would save you, that Satan would destroy you, that your own wicked heart would have its own way now and forget that there is a future. You know that God has read the whole story of your ruin, the evil thoughts and passions, the enslaving habits strong as iron, the dreadful catalogue of your crimes against him, however blameless your life has

been before men, and that his justice must shut you up in torment if you reject Christ; and you know his desire is to rescue you from the whole, to clear your heart of the evil already there, to take away the fountain of pollution that wells within you, to blot out your whole wicked life together, and to snatch you from the lake that burneth with quenchless fire. You know his palace is open to you, where the King of kings would seat you by his side, where Jesus—the sinner's Friend, the Son of God—would be your friend forever.

And what does sin offer you? To give you your own way here and let you indulge your own fancies or your own passions. It offers to sing only pleasant songs in your ears and let you dream away life's flying hours in peace. DYING MAN! Can you be taken by such a snare? Can you have your own way against Jehovah's will? Can you enjoy one sinful pleasure except he grants it in wrath and judgment? Can the song of lying hope drown the thunder of his fury, or the roarings of that fiery furnace? Can you sleep in peace here or in the grave when his trumpet bids you wake? And hereafter! Sin makes you no promise for hereafter; only God's voice comes back from the prison of despair. Condemned immortal, listen to it!—"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away;

and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire:" Rev. xx. 11-15.

Choose ye, then, this day, whom ye will serve; for the time is short and the Judge is at hand.

CHAPTER III.

THE HALF-WAY CHRISTIAN.

THERE was a time when the contrast between the Christian and unbeliever stood out in strong relief and challenged the attention of the most thoughtless; their general characters, their conduct, their social position and daily life, all forced the gospel on the sight of men, and made even the least Christian a "living epistle." It was the time when our religion began its progress through the world; when its simple garb and unostentatious goodness rebuked the Pharisee's phylacteries and trumpet-tongued charities; when the glory of a good heart shining from within faded all the beauties of his painted and varnished morality; when, on the other hand, the Christian's purity and truth exposed the pollutions of idolatry and the deadly fruit they bore; when envy and malice woke storms of persecution against the church that plagued and shook the world. It was the time when, to be a Christian, one could neither eat nor drink, marry nor give in marriage, retire to rest nor rise to the day's duties, toil nor live nor die like other people; when to become a Christian was to

lose one's social rank, however humble it had been before,—to be rendered unfit to fill any social or civil position according to the customs of the age,—in a word, to be dropped out of the very fabric of society and to lie among the undistinguished rubbish on its pavement.

That day, we know, has long passed away; the little leaven cast into the lump of history has penetrated all its parts. Even where the gospel is disowned, it spreads a genial and a humanizing sway, so that the Turk, the Hindoo, and the Islander, alike reject its constraints and crave its blessings. In more favoured lands it has given tone to all society. Law is a far gentler and wiser thing because Jesus lived and loved and died; the Sabbath is gradually taking place among the institutions of civilized nations; and the ordinary language of life is shaped and coloured by the utterances of religion.

Thus, in a measure, the old landmarks of the church are being removed—rather, are being covered—by the generous products of her eighteen centuries' toil. Neither social nor civil peculiarities now point out the Christian to the gaze of men. If he only abstains from purely spiritual duties while others are with him,—such duties as prayer, religious conversation, &c.,—the fact that he is a believer may escape notice indefinitely. And this, not because the hearts of impenitent men are better, but only

that their lives are more under our influence. True, the victory has not been all on our side: the church has given ground also; but the church has more transformed the life of the world than the world has corrupted the life of the church. Between the pronounced and unflinching on either side, however, there is still a gap; it is filled by two classes of compromisers,—the Worldly Christian and what we may call the Half-way Christian.

But, notwithstanding the apparent likeness of these two classes, there remains a gulf between them. One is the unfaithful servant of Christ; the other is the daunted and fearful but persevering servant of sin. One is breaking the vow he once so heartily made to be the Lord's; the other refuses even to vow in heart whatever the lips may declare, and he lies beneath the constant, tremendous wrath of God. One is called back with the plea, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed;" the other hears the voice, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise and call upon thy God, if so be thou perish not!" One has but to return to the path he has forsaken to be forever safe and happy; the other has the work of a lifetime to undo, and that work is hardening into adamantine ruin under his hands.

Grievous, then, as is the state of the first,—and God forbid that I should palliate his sin or hide his

danger,—the other's guilt and peril yet more urgently demand our pity and faithfulness. All the more, too, because he has reached a point where self-deception is so easy, where conscience may be lulled into so obstinate a sleep, where the graces of life may be the handmaids of eternal death.

Let us devote this chapter, therefore, to the half-way Christian; let us describe him, and look at his history and his prospects.

And, in describing him, let us look at his *character*. He is a *sinner*; and this word, that we use so easily and so often, however quietly it may slide from the tongue, has, we know, a terrible significance. To put aside, now, all thought of those positive transgressions from which no man living is free, to put them aside a moment and pare down the indictment to the utmost,—to be a sinner is to keep back from Almighty God his rights. It is not to love or trust him, though he bids us, though he made us, though he gave his dear Son to save us! It is to exist upon his bounty in a world he fitted up for us, and yet not give him the tribute he demands. It is to give him, for a garden, a desert; for a loyal province, a rebellious land; for subjects, traitors; for children, strangers and enemies. And, just as the want of food is famine and death and the want of liberty is bondage, so sin, even in this

lowest form of it, is awful wickedness and eternal woe.

But the man we speak of is a *thoughtful* sinner; his days of careful levity are gone,—never, I hope and pray, never to return! Something has “met him in the path of worldliness and vanity;” perhaps danger has shaken the sword at him, or sickness has withered his strength and mocked his hopes, or bereavement has shivered the earthen casket that held all his treasures and made life for the time a blank, or his plans have failed him and riches have taken to themselves wings and fled away, or one of the Lord’s ambassadors has spoken a faithful word that he cannot forget, or conscience has raised her stern voice at last and warned him to make his peace with God. However it began, he can no longer say he forgets to think about religion; for she will not be forgotten. Whether he will or not, he is bound now to thought and seriousness. He may shake it off at times; the heart is a very elastic thing, and recovers its spring and spirit in spite of all sad truth; but the load comes back daily, and he is compelled to look death, judgment, and an angry God, in the face.

He is a *daunted* and *fearful* sinner. Other men may rush recklessly back into pleasure and business, they may hide the agony they cannot escape under life’s cares and triumphs, they may take the wretched

substitutes of amusement and excitement for the peace they may never, never know; but not he! He must stand with shrinking and sick heart and watch the scythe of death swing closer and closer and closer to his breast and know that it cuts down every hope of salvation when it strikes. He cannot persuade himself to call heartily, trustfully, on that Friend who is reported to be near but whom his eye does not see; but neither can he blindfold himself or dance on to meet the stroke. No; he is driven to obey with bitter faithfulness all the minor commands of his King, to do all the minute and toilsome details of duty that could be exacted of a man, only to let alone that royal law, to leave undone that noble and happy thing which would set him free! What a bondage!

The half Christian, then, is a sinner, amiable, perhaps, and correct in life, but withholding from God every thing of value in his heart; bent by external forces to thought and solemnity; driven by conscience and fear from his chosen way of life into religious observances but not into a pious heart.

Look now at his *conduct* towards God and man.

There are certain things a king must receive from his subjects:—feelings and acts of duty, without which he may reign, indeed, in name, but can be only a painted show and the semblance of a monarch: loyal affection and a strong principle of

obedience to his authority are vital to his dignity and pillars of his kingly state. So, also, there needs something more to make a father or a mother than the presence of children in one's house: if confidence, love, and prompt obedience do not dwell in it, *there is no parent there.*

Now, if any large number of a king's subjects should refuse those tributes of heart and life to their sovereign, he would be virtually dethroned, however minutely they might observe all the forms and proprieties of court etiquette. They might even carry their attentions so far and prosecute them so gracefully that their injured lord should wink at their treason; for there are always many other faculties in a man than those of his office; yet would it be treason still.

But God's offices and character square exactly with each other; if you offend him as King and Father there is no making it up to him in other relations; no sentimental gratitude for the beauties and bounties of nature, no superficial regrets for past indifference to him as a friend, no regrets, however deep, for this kind of wrong, can conciliate him. Nothing will, which does not include a full acknowledgment of him as Father and King, and an humble confession of our sin.

Now, it is just this impossible thing the half-way Christian is trying to do. Perfect love and perfect

faith are the supreme law of God's kingdom, and there is no such thing as violating this supreme law and yet being an obedient subject by dint of observing the other laws. Yet these are the two features of this man's life:—habitual breach of the supreme law, and sedulous regard of the specific laws. No love or trust fill his heart or give meaning to his life; but he reads his Bible, "says his prayers," observes the Sabbath, abstains from dissipation and vice,—in a word, performs, as nearly as he can, all the external duties of a Christian. We must describe his conduct towards God, therefore, as *sin in the dress of religion*.

In his conduct towards men he is best described by negatives. His life is a good one as to the things he does not do; his example is good because of the conduct it does not inculcate. Life should be adorned with holy deeds. A prayerful mind, a heavenly temper, a Christ-like benevolence, should mark its course and tell its spring. There should be such sacred courage, such resolute following of good, such praise of God, such suggestions of heaven, such diffusing of a pure and thankful spirit, as would supplant the fascinations of a sinful life before men with the beauty of a godlike one. These are the positive qualities of Christian life and the fruits of the Spirit:—love, joy, fervour, faithfulness, truth, goodness. To strike these all off the roll of our

duties and deeds and yet call our life and example good, would be to betray a miserably low standard of goodness. The best feature of his life is that he has left off the sins of hand and tongue by which other sinners discover their sin of heart; he is no longer profane, cruel, malicious, headstrong, passionate, intemperate, sacrilegious. But he has not taken faith, prayer, zeal, praise, and a heart that burns to do good, in their stead. He betrays his sin of heart less often and less grossly now; but *it is there still*. His example may avail to keep other men from sins; but it will never spread a heavenly temper through their souls or counterwork sin by the strong sympathies of a holy heart. His conduct to men, then, must be described as *sin striking in,—grown less flagrant and more subtle*.

Let us look now, briefly, at his treatment of Bible truth. Nobody doubts that truth everywhere is to be loved, believed, and acted on, or that truth about God, heaven, and salvation, is the most admirable of all truths. Yet, in fact, no subject of general interest is so variously disposed of as Bible truth. A few gladly and gratefully adopt it; some fasten upon one idea and compel it unwillingly to crowd out all the rest; some strive to forget it; some explain it away; some cavil and speculate and break its force. What does the half-way Christian do?

He usually makes a point of admitting it all in a

general way. If he has doubts and difficulties he hides them even from himself, and insists on believing the doctrines just as they are received. This, not because of a strong and loyal pleasure in being taught of God, but because it takes away one of the distinctions between himself and Christians and thus weakens the accusations of conscience. But he declines to deal with these truths separately, or, if he does, it must be doctrinally; he *will not* consider them practically at all.

He admits man's total depravity; but it does not urge him to immediate repentance and humility and to kneel at the feet of Christ as the only Saviour. He shrinkingly acknowledges that the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment;" but if you ask, "What will ye do in the day of desolation?" why not flee from the wrath to come?—he turns silently away or makes some hollow and vain excuse. His state of mind about Bible truth, then, must be described as *sin trying to hide itself in orthodoxy*.

Once more; notice his feelings and conduct in view of his prospects for eternity. Ask him about them:—"What feelings and thoughts have you when you look on death,—when sickness or danger besets you,—when the awful day of reckoning looms up, lighted by the glories and terrors of the world behind it?—what do you think? what do you feel?" And the honest answer, if you could

wrest it from that self-deceitful heart, must be, "I try not to think; I bid all feeling down; I hasten away to some other subject; I speculate on doctrines, or do some duty, or lose myself in business,—any thing, rather than keep my heart steadily to the truth till it breaks and goes to God." Or, "I make some excuse to relieve me: as, I know not why I am not a Christian; or, I cannot feel; or, I must wait on the Lord; or, I am too busy just now,—something to make my guilt look less heinous, my danger less quick and terrible, than it really is." Or, "I call myself and my heart hard names, until I succeed in diverting my attention from the truths I ought to feel to the things I am trying to say, or to complacency in my virtuous indignation against myself." Here, then, is *sin conscience-smitten*, but *procrastinating, flattering, deceiving*.

But how came he into this state? Other men fall back from conviction into carelessness, or progress into piety: why is he left just here? To answer this question, we must examine his history and see what God did and what *he* did.

God gave him a mind able to look at truth or away from it; gave truth a being and an attraction that ought to sway his heart. It was a fearful as well as a glorious gift! It put him in the midst of eternal verities on which the Eternal Mind has ever

dwelt and by which it moves. It spread out before him a universe too wonderful to be objectless, too various and noble not to have a Maker, a Keeper, and a King. It offered that God himself to his knowledge. It drew the paths of duty and of sin in bright characters on the map of life, and bade him choose, choose wisely, and be blest. It sang to him of Jesus and of heaven. Verily, man could not live thus, having these things before him, and not touch the spring of judgment!

God gave him a heart as well as a mind; poured the sweet sensibilities into their channels to water all his life with tenderness and love. He addressed to it those high persuasions to goodness and glory before whose eloquence the seductions of sin should have faded out of sight. He whispered all the story of the cross, that should have broken the hardest heart.

God did another thing: when that ear had grown deaf and slumberous and all the senses had sunk into apathy and the heart was stiffening into death, God sounded an alarm. It is not he that sets us adrift in this world and lulls us into deep slumber with treacherous songs, and then gathers the clouds and winds into his hands and besets us with storms and death!

The Holy Spirit descends upon him and commands a pause, a pondering, a prayer; kindles the

flame of wrath across his chosen way, but bids him turn and live; brings him to relenting and self-scrutiny; urges on him a longing after something better than earthliness and pleasure; makes the void within swell out vaster, hungrier, while the world dwindles away to vanity and dust; pictures the joy of pardon and of peace with the Highest.

He feels at last his danger and his unworthiness of safety; he is beset with the thought of a refuge in Christ; he is made to know that he can give no good reason why he has not sought shelter there. Thus much God has done; and he still urges him to faith and obedience.

All this, you see, is in one direction; it is manifestly aimed at his conversion: will any one venture to say that God has done any thing on the other side, even though his heart should prove to be fatally hardened and his perdition sure?

Ask, now, what *he* has done. He has thought of religion while God constrained him to think, and no longer. He trembles while the thunder rolls, and no longer. He has faced the truth of his shame and danger while it fastened on him, and no longer. He gives up his vain excuses when they are wrenched away by a stronger than he, but not before. He has clothed himself in that armour of proof against conscience and God,—a formally-religious life. He has taken a high moral tone and denounced the in-

consistencies of Christians instead of his own. All he has done in the matter may be summed up in one word:—he has RESISTED THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Now we see why he stands where he does: he has advanced so far, because God is so good; he has gone no farther, because he is so unthankful and evil.

What will his end be? We may answer this question very briefly.

He may, by God's grace, be brought to repent of his present sin and be saved. I say "*his present sin*,"—the sin of resisting the Holy Spirit. This is not his thought, I know. He is inclined to believe that he is doing his duty so far as a man can, but that God for some mysterious reason is keeping him back; that, therefore, he must go on patiently as he is and wait God's good time for deliverance. What a terrible mistake! "All things are now ready." The sacrifice is slain, the Intercessor found, the Comforter come down from heaven, the Bible given, his heart touched: "what more," saith the Lord, "could have been done in my vineyard that I have not done in it?" All things are now ready, and God invites him to enter and be blest. "The kingdom suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." The vehement and earnest in seeking God, the importunate in prayer, they

that seek him early and search for him with all their heart, *shall find him*. Is it no sin to be half-hearted and slack at such a time?

He may justify himself, (Job ix. 20,) and make his way seem right in his own eyes; but the Lord will condemn him, and the end of his way is death: (Prov. xvi. 25.) With hearts so treacherous as our's are, it is easy to persuade ourselves that our course is right, or that any other is impossible, even though conscience murmurs and protests against it. All we own to ourselves is an inward aching, which we can neither explain nor charm away,—a thunderous mutter in the air, that will not syllable itself and speak,—the voice of our blood crying against us from the ground!

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?” That is, Are not our opportunities numbered? We drift idly through them, as through islands in the harbour's mouth, into the blank and pitiless ocean, and are swallowed up. “Many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.”

CHAPTER IV.

BE READY!

It is one of the commonest principles of human prudence to guard against possible evils. The dikes around our fields are raised not merely to the height of ordinary tides, but so far as we think secures us against flood and storm. We build our houses to endure not the breezes only, but such gales as may never blow. We erect hospitals in cities not because pestilence will come, but because it may come. We collect munitions, build forts, train troops, not when war is imminent, but in days of safety and peace. And he who neglects such precautions—the man who makes no count of winds and floods—the state which fails to contrive against pestilence and war—is felt to have bought ruin with folly.

Yet more pressing is this when the coming of the event is sure and only its date uncertain. No man knows when death will find him; but that is an argument, not for postponing the preparation of his will and the arrangement of his property, but for hastening it. If I know I have a journey to take

but not the day when I shall be summoned to begin it, I should be blind not to dispose every thing in perfect readiness for it, so as to obey the sudden call, when it comes, with that promptness and preparation which is the fruit of wisdom.

To this broad maxim the Scripture often appeals. "The coming of the Son of man" is sure. Nothing else is so certain :—not the recurrence of the seasons; not the earth's silent travel through its orbit; not the rising of to-morrow's sun. These all shall pass away; but not He. As a vesture shall he fold them up, and they shall be changed; they shall perish, but he abides, and his years have no end. And because that dread encounter, that bright and awful centre of our histories, may come in any hour, we are entreated to be "ready."

The figure used in this appeal, which describes our meeting the Judge of all by saying that "the Son of man cometh"—whereas, in fact, we may go to him—is a very common form of speech. We continually say that fall, or winter, or the new year, or the grave, is coming near,—that the sun rises, that the shore recedes,—when it is we that move, and not they. Just so may be the coming of the Lord: he awaits us, and time and death sweep us silently on to his feet. In truth, the distance between us and him is not a matter of space, but of *visibility*. He is already beside us! When he lifts the curtain,

and shows his awful face and speaks our doom, he will be "come."

The first thought here is that some kind of preparation for death and judgment is necessary, and that not to be prepared is extremely perilous. "Be ye ready." It is possible, therefore, to be *unready*. This exposes at once the awful deceit and falseness of that skeptical impression which so often lulls the salutary fear of sinners,—that God, after all, is not a punisher; that, if men should go before him as they are, he would find some excuse for them, and not execute, as he declares he will, "the fierceness of his anger."

If this doctrine of Universalism is true, then men may die any day of their lives,—the liar with his lie upon his lips, the drunkard in his cups, the murderer red-handed,—and there is no guilt so deep, no crime so cruel, no corruption so foul—but this Being will pardon them!

Yet the Scripture emphatically contradicts all this. It declares men may be unprepared to meet the Son of God, and it urges them to be "ready."

Let us look a little at some of the grounds on which this universal—I mean this *promiscuous*—salvation is argued. And the readiest, perhaps, on man's lip is that God is *too good* to inflict eternal sufferings on his creature. Now, God is good; that

is certain : and his goodness is in some way reconcilable with the existence of pain, for pain is found everywhere, though God is good. One week's bill of mortality, one week of our own experience, would seem to settle that.

Besides, is God too good to punish us and yet not too good to *deceive* us?—frighten us with the most appalling but empty threats,—predict for us immeasurable woes, which have no existence *but in his word*? What conceivable object is there for these threats if there is no hell? Why should he warn us against imaginary dangers? Why shake at us the sword with which he never means to strike? Is it to make us better? Then, first, God is not wise and skilful enough to perfect the deception; for it seems men have found him out, as Satan did, and know that we shall not surely die. But, secondly, suppose the end were gained in this life, and men lived in dread of a woe that does not exist: what would be the effect of the discoveries they must make in death and after death? With what eyes would his creatures look at him! Verily, the Bible account would just be reversed: instead of God judging men, men would judge God!

But often it is said, “God is too just to visit finite offences with infinite punishment.” I answer, God is just; that is certain: yet he constantly connects long trains of consequences with *single acts*. A

man foolishly risks his property a day, and beggars himself and his children. He leaves his house uninsured one night, and the labour of years is swept away. Through carelessness he takes a dose of poison, and dies *once for all*. Where then is the impossibility, as regards God's justice, that the way we spend these long years of probation should influence our whole eternal after-life?

But the case is sometimes argued in another way. It is said we are punished for each transgression of every kind of law *as we go*. If we eat unwholesome food we get sick; if we sin against public opinion we lose the respect and good-will of society; and so on.

This is certainly a dangerous argument for the Universalist. It seems, now, there are laws, and those laws are enforced by penalties. Then this will surely be most true and most conspicuous in the highest kind of law,—that is, the moral law. Do we find it so *in this life*?

We see men suffer here with some uniformity if they violate the laws of health or outrage the moral sense of men. But do we see judgments of proportionate severity fall on those who sin against God? Do the profane, the Sabbath-breakers, the prayerless, the hard-hearted, receive according to their guilt this side the grave? Are we not constantly perplexed by just the opposite fact,—that

“these are *the ungodly* who prosper in the earth”? Do not those we esteem excellent and holy suffer above measure, while the scoffer escapes?

It is plain, then, that the highest class of offences is not punished in this life, and, inasmuch as—the Universalist himself being judge—all offences are punished, this also must be visited somewhere. To borrow the old illustration, if a watchmaker, a wise and steadfast man, having worked industriously at the parts of a watch, suddenly gathers them up and takes them to another room, I conclude at once that it is *to finish the watch*.

Once more it is said, “It is a horrible thought that sin and pain should last forever.” I admit it: but is it not horrible that they should *be at all*? Yet it is true: men do sin, and death and woe do reign, nevertheless. And what remedy can there be beyond the grave for our ruin that does not fail with sinners here? Who shall be more eloquent than God himself? What atonement more precious than the blood of the Son of God? What power mightier than God the Holy Spirit? If these are lost on us here, the case is hopeless. So reason confesses; so God declares.

Such are some of the sophistries by which man tries to prove that preparation for death and judgment is not necessary; and we see how idle they are,—the mere creatures of his vain wishes for im-

punishment in sin. Let us look now at some facts on the other side which show that preparation is necessary.

Consider, first, that man's natural thoughts are not heavenly, but worldly. Let any impenitent reader recall the thoughts and cares of yesterday. On what did his mind run? About what did he hope, fear, grieve, rejoice? To what would his thoughts fly back this instant if he left them free? To things that are seen and temporal:—things of the earth; things of which pride or covetousness, revenge, self-interest, or vanity, can lay hold; out of which God, heaven, and Jesus Christ could be left entirely and not missed! Now, if you suppose God ever so tolerant of your sins, there will be an utter unfitness for the thoughts and joys of heaven just in this worldly temper of your mind. How perfectly out of his element does the thoughtless sinner now feel himself when a religious conversation is carried on around him! And would it relieve him if the employment and the society were fixed on him forever?

But there is a great event lying between death and heaven which we must not overlook, for God will not forget it:—"after death *the judgment.*" And the different views of men about its time and mode no more show that there is no judgment than different mental philosophies show there is no mind,

or different medical theories prove there is no pain, no sickness, no medicine, no bodies. That heart so godless, that life so full of transgressions, have both to bear a strict and terrible review; every dark corner, every wrong deed, will rest under the kindling of Jehovah's eye!

He will try you by *a law*. Have you kept it? Have you loved him with heart and soul and mind and strength? Have you loved your fellow-men as yourself? Are you "perfect" before God? I pray you, answer not these plain questions heedlessly: self deception cannot alter the facts. And, if you weigh them ever so briefly, I know there will come out of the heart's depth a confession:—"If thou, Lord, art strict to mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" There is but one way, my friend, in which the shameful history of a godless life can be unread: if you refuse that way, you will die unprepared and be judged as you die.

It is but too certain God is angry with you now. Your discontent and restlessness prove it; your life, marked with disappointment, bereavement, and pain; your unwillingness to think of him; your recoil from the sight of death; your haste to drown it in other thoughts. His word declares it: he gathers up all the images of woe and fury and peoples the swift future as it approaches with menaces and flames. He describes you minutely in the indictment he has drawn

He applies to you the curses of his broken law. God is angry with you!

He tells you he will appear in the Judgment, clothed in that same wrath against all who come before him with the same hearts and feelings they have indulged here. Now, if the anger of a God is fearful,—if we live by his kindness, and suffer under his frown, and die at his word,—if even here, where mercy is tempering every infliction and perpetually lightening his hand, pain, dismay, and terrors beset us on every side,—it is surely worth our while to prepare ourselves, according to his advice, for that “great and terrible day of the Lord.” If there is another character in which we may appear,—a character on which he will smile and send eternal blessings,—surely, surely it would be wise to put it on and escape.

It is time now to put another question. What is there in death and judgment, for which it is necessary to prepare? What makes these events such a crisis?

We find in death *the end of our probation*. The life we now live is given us, not for itself, but for what it may bring after it. From our childhood different courses of conduct are set before us, among which we choose, and whose consequences fall on us. Obedience or disobedience to parents, diligence or

negligence at school, vicious or virtuous habits in early life,—these, and such as these, are the alternatives laid upon us, and much of life is wrapped up in each one. Greatest of them all is the choice between religion and ungodliness,—whether our early feet shall tread the heavenly road, or our steps take hold on death.

One after another the time for these decisions passes away. If we fail to make them deliberately, neglect and an evil heart make them for us. “Millions of money” cannot buy you back “an inch of time.” But, because religion is the most precious thing of all, because it lays hold upon eternal years, we have its words of tenderest love repeated in our ears for a whole lifetime. Behold, he stands at the door of our hearts through the long night and knocks. If we open to him, he enters as a friend, bringing blessings inestimable, peace and endless joy, in his hands.

But, when death palsies our arm and himself unbars the door, all is changed, and that forever. Then farewell Sabbaths, gospel, prayer! Farewell to opportunities, days of grace, and dealings of the Holy Spirit! Unwittingly, in our carnal slumber, we ran out our little remnant of reprieve; tumbled heavily from our height of privilege into a bottomless abyss. There is no second antechamber to God’s judgment-hall; we step through that chill

and narrow gateway, the grave, into his awful presence, and our probation is ended.

We find in death also the end of our stewardship and a final rendering of accounts. We are God's stewards. He set us in our several offices and spread out opportunities to be useful, to be happy, like fields of fruitful soil, around us. He gave us our minds fitted to know and love and keep the truth. He sent our serious thoughts and lessons of Providence. But not ignorantly! not thoughtlessly! Not one of all our blessings *escaped* him: they obeyed him. All are registered. He will inquire of us the history of every one. He will know how we used or abused those gifts bought with his Son's blood. And what can we tell him? What countless numbers we have forgotten entirely. How our Sabbaths were spent; what became of our opportunities to pray, to study his word, to confess and repent of sin; what use we made of the good examples and the terrible warnings he set before us,—what a blank our memories are about them.

But a worse matter is this:—the sinner has *nothing to show for them*. If you cut down an old tree you can read in its rings the story of every favourable season in the last age; while immortal men, who have to be judged, have never prospered in any season of God's bounty!

That day will end all. God will dry up the

streams of blessing for the waster; hush the sweet Sabbath bells; release the stubborn heart from his merciful constraints; only, insist on knowing to what these kindnesses have amounted. And to every question you can only answer, "Lost! lost!" The echo of the confession will speak your doom,—Lost!

Yet a more terrible thing will the sinner find in death,—the end of all Christ's efforts to save him. How great they have been! It is not often that the kindest friend is willing both to make sacrifices for us and to urge us to accept his kindness: he is apt to feel that he has done enough when he has put the gift or the help within our reach; and that, if we neglect it then, it is our own fault. But not so has our Saviour dealt with us: if he had, not a solitary Christian would have lifted an eye of faith to that dear cross; not a voice of prayer or praise would have broken the deep silence of a ruined world or changed its groans to songs.

Not so has our Saviour dealt with us. When he had prepared a salvation for us, at once he began to commend it to us. It is he that now urges it on you; "we are ambassadors for Christ;" I bring my message from his word; the almighty Spirit he has purchased and sent down is the only hope that men will hear.

Now, in death all these things pass away. The blood of Christ avails not beyond the grave; his

voice will never be raised in invitation, promise, or entreaty there; the Spirit of all grace will be gracious no more forever. In one little hour all that man can depend upon for help and redemption, all that sheds one ray of hope upon his future, all that invites repentance and forbids despair, will be swept away.

It is plain, then, that we may sum up all this argument in this one word:—here, preparation is possible; there, *impossible*. Here, “the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin;” there, “he that is filthy shall be filthy still.” Here, hope and privilege and blessing compass us about; there, a guilty conscience and a dreadful Judge. Here is the day of mercy; there the day of doom.

In this world the sinner’s feeling is, “I have time enough and to spare; God’s mercy is so free, heaven’s gate opens so widely, that any hour will do, —even the hour of death.” God’s language is, “Hasten, O sinner! all things are now ready; my word is open to you, my Son is slain for you, my Spirit strives with you. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart; now is the day of salvation!” In the judgment, God will say, “Depart!” Man will cry, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!”

It remains now but to ask, What is it to be

“ready”? How can we prepare for death and judgment?

From what has been said it is evident we will find two things indispensable at the last:—a *full pardon* and a *new heart*. As we have all been unbelievers, we are all “condemned already;” as we were born of human race, we are “dead in trespasses and sins.” To fail of pardon is to *meet* God’s curse; to fail of holiness is to *invite* it.

Neither of these, however, can we procure for ourselves: we can neither deserve, nor buy, nor achieve, salvation. If we have no Helper, it is utterly beyond our reach.

And this it is which makes Christ’s work on earth the pivot of our destinies. He is the Door, as he said, through which alone man can escape. But then, he is a perfect refuge; he can supply both our fatal wants. God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood; that God might be just, and justify him who believeth in Jesus. He has power, therefore, to forgive sins. None can condemn his people or lay any thing to their charge; for he has died for their sins and risen again for their justification. Thus the “full pardon” is possible to men; it waits for them at the foot of the cross.

He has provided, also, for our other vital necessity,—a new heart. “If he had not gone away,

the Comforter had not come; but now he is ascended to heaven, that Holy Spirit has come down to quicken and to save. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. And if we who are evil know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him! He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Thus the "new heart" is provided as well as the "pardon."

Our place to prepare, then, is at Jesus' feet; the time, now; the way, to own ourselves lost, helpless, and guilty, and to receive and rest on him for salvation. Is he not worthy? Has he not bought with his heart's blood the privilege of saving poor sinners?

CHAPTER V.

DESPISEST THOU?

“OR despisest thou the riches of his goodness, forbearance, longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” What an appalling paradox is this! Man despising God and God’s goodness! “Despisest *thou*?” Paul says. Hast thou built up thy Babel-tower of pride so high that thou canst look out and look *down* on thy Maker? He piled up the mountains; he sowed the broad field of heaven with stars; he kindled the solar fires; he reigns immortal in glory everlasting: hath thine arrogance mounted up so high as to shed scorn on the Almighty?

And which of all his attributes wilt thou choose to bear thy contempt? Wilt thou despise his might who can shiver the solid world with a blow,—yea, without a blow? Wilt thou despise his justice who hath prepared eternal fire for the devil and his angels, which shall be the portion also of the impenitent sinner? Thou canst not! Which shall it be, then? “The riches of his goodness!” Thou wilt point thy finger at God’s heart, turning within him,

melting to pity, loving the world; at the pierced heart of Christ,—pierced, too, for thee! This is Paul's accusation: let us see if it can be proved. The principle affirmed is, that to continue impenitent is to throw contempt on God's kindness. I suppose you to deny or at least to doubt it: I undertake, as Paul did, to prove it.

But, before we begin the argument, let me entreat my readers to employ a deep and solemn honesty in this matter,—to read with their hearts. If you attend only as to a curious question, fairly open to debate and giving room for ingenious remark, it will not profit you.

Listen, then, I pray you, with an urgent honesty that must know the reality, and can be content with nothing less. Acknowledge your vital interest in the matter. You have a great stake here, nothing less than your eternal life, depending on the decision of this very question,—viz.: whether or not there is a *damning guilt* in neglecting God and his offers of grace. And your first concern is to come at the truth on this point, be it what it may. Follow out the argument patiently, therefore; examine every position carefully; and receive, as in God's sight, the conclusion if it fairly follows from the premises.

The riches of God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, are infinite. It is little even of man's

poor conceptions that can find expression in words; and, alas, how little hope there is that even those words, though so far below the truth, will find an echo in sinners' hearts!

In setting forth the wonder of God's goodness, I remark, first, that *it seemed to outshine justice*. If there is any one attribute we should expect always to sway a king, it is justice. It is his most essential quality that he should distribute his efforts and his cares righteously among his subjects. His first and chief intention must be to fence about with equal sacredness the welfare of all. Justice is the first want of the kingdom and the original glory of the king. His might and his wisdom, his sternness and his kindness, his private and his public acts, must follow up this end and accomplish it, or the best lustre of his crown is gone.

Now, if you search the Old Testament Scriptures to discover the character of God you will find nothing else more plainly declared than his justice. He "will by no means spare the guilty;" he "is a jealous God;" "the soul that sinneth, it shall die:" "are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal? saith the Lord."

Heaven forbid that I should deny that God is just in the New Testament also. The very business of the gospel is to preserve his equity from spot or doubt in the pardon of sinners. But I need hardly

remind you that if justice had absorbed his attention, so to speak, we should have been very briefly disposed of. That attribute would have been thoroughly employed and satisfied by our condemnation. The beauty and peculiar glory of the gospel lies in the *mercy* it displays. The quality most set forth in it is the love of God. Its good news is that Jesus shall save us from our sins.

And herein the wonderful riches of his goodness is shown ; that, just as he is, his goodness has come before his justice,—stands between us and it, and tempers its tremendous fires into a heavenly light. The feeling that can outrun his jealousy, take to itself the first place, and give character to his deeds, must be strong indeed.

Note, again, that his kindness *gave a new aspect to his holiness*. The first feature of holiness is the supreme determination to be right and to do right; the second is intense abhorrence of sin. The first of these was the continual glory of God from eternity; the second burst forth in unquenchable fire against the rebelling angels. But it was reserved for us, in our blindness and misery, to bring out another character from the clouds and darkness. Not in *contrast* with those first exhibitions: they burn on in eternal splendour, lighting up heaven with a perpetual joy. They are “the glory of the Lord God,” which, we are told, is “the light

thereof." But it was reserved for us to put another sun in heaven's firmament; it is the glory of the Lamb.

His kindness has added this new feature, therefore, to his holiness,—*a longing to recover sinners and restore them to holiness.* Mere abhorrence of sin would have simply banished us into the darkness forever. It would have said to us, "Ye have chosen your portion! God and happiness were before you; sin and no God and no joy; and you chose sin: depart into your choice!" But, instead of this, God said, "How can I give thee up? I love the world; I will not the death of him that dieth, but rather that he should turn and live: will ye not repent and return unto the Lord your God?" Hatred of sin abated not in the least; but the recovery of the sinner was a new thing, which "the angels desire to look into." They adore with unceasing admiration the longsuffering of God.

God's kindness appears, again, in this:—that he loved man so tenderly that he gave his own Son to die for him. That Son by whom he made the world, with whom he shared his infinite glories, who had communed with him in eternal unity,—that Son he spared not, but delivered him up for us all.

Have you weighed the import of the divine record on this subject?—"And we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of

the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he n God."* "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."† "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."‡

Let me come, now, directly to you, my impenitent reader. The wonderful riches of God's goodness to you appears in this:—that *he has continued your opportunities and blessings so long*. Of all hearts, the heart of a benefactor is the most sensitive. The very warmth and softness that make him so bounteous and so kind prepare him to be chilled with disappointment if his good-will is lightly valued or ill returned.

To say nothing just here of the look your conduct wears, the simple fact that he has not succeeded in winning you to be saved makes his forbearance difficult and his perseverance wonderful. He has, so to speak, risked every thing—his justice, his authority, his Son—to win you to repentance. It was strange that he should do this once; that he should *keep it up*, and that for years, so that the youngest of my readers has set him at nought many times, is wellnigh incredible. Why? Why is the wonderful, the awful experiment repeated and renewed

* 1 John iv. 14, 15.

† John xv. 13.

‡ Romans v. 8.

almost without end? Why are the glory of God and the coming of his kingdom held in suspense, waiting the unwilling decision of a condemned sinner? O man, whosoever thou art, fall down quickly before God, and adore the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering!

The natural tendency of kindness is to subdue the rebellious and shame the ungrateful.

Even the brutes come under this law. Below and behind reason is an instinct that constrains to return good-will to the kind: the whole animal kingdom acknowledges and obeys it. You cage the timidest of birds, speak always gently to it, provide its food and care for its various little wants, knowing that if it survive the loss of liberty it will learn to love and obey you. You give shelter to the colt, you feed and tend and train it, feeling sure that kindness and firmness mingled will at last enable you to animate it with your spirit and guide it by the lightest touch according to your will. You take the wildest beast of the desert, accustom it to your presence, teach it to take pleasure in your voice, and actually, as has been often seen, bind up its life in your own so that it pines away and dies if it lose you. Such a virtue hath God planted in the very brutes that perish, and bound up the whole world of living things together under the law of kindness.

Much more evident is this if we notice the effect on men of human kindness. What man is there of us who does not look back upon his mother's love as the most beautiful, most moving thing in all his history? If she still lives, which of us is not brought by the magic of it to abate a harsh voice, to unbend a proud brow, to mingle softness with his strength in her presence for her sake? Who does not own it among the strongest arguments against a thing he wishes to do that it would grieve his mother? And who does not feel that he who offends or wounds a mother wantonly has fallen from his high estate and manhood and put his best nature into bondage?

• If, alas, she has been taken from us,—if we must look back on disobedient and ungrateful days,—if she was snatched away before we could offer the poor atonement of confession or receive the blessing of forgiveness,—if the tears we caused were never wiped away, but were laid with her in the grave,—oh, what anguish is like the anguish of that recollection? If with years of life we could buy back one hour to repair the wrong, who would not give them? It is the thought of her tender love that subdues us.

In the days of the good Dr. Doddridge there lived in his neighbourhood an Irish labourer besotted alike with superstition and vice. The slave

of his passions and of strong drink, he gave way to his anger in a quarrel that arose, and murdered a man who had been his friend. He was arrested, tried, and condemned to die; and he bade fair, at first, to die as he had lived,—a savage. All who came into his cell with warning, instruction, or prayer, were driven furiously away. At last Dr. Doddridge entered his den, where he lay in chains and darkness,—entered it with tears of pity for the poor outcast who was about to settle his account *with man only* on the gallows and be swept on thence to the bar of God.

Another day he mingled words of pity with his tears, and asked the sullen but wondering convict if he could serve him in any way. Were there any comforts he could procure him? Had he any message to send to friends without? Should he write for him to his mother? Slowly the blind and desperate heart began to soften; gradually the law of kindness asserted its sway. The wild beast was tamed; the murderer wept with shame and gratitude.

After a time Doddridge's labours were blessed to his conversion: the proofs of it were uncommonly clear and convincing. His benefactor then exerted himself to obtain a pardon, or at least to have the capital sentence commuted; but in vain. The poor criminal said repeatedly that he cared little for life except to devote it to his unwearied friend.

When the fatal day arrived, he was asked, as usual, if he had any last request to make: he begged that on his way to his death he might be taken to Dr. Doddridge's house. In front of that door the cart stopped, and the condemned man, with his hands bound, was permitted to go to it. There, in the face of the multitude assembled to see him die, he kneeled down and kissed the threshold and prayed for a blessing on that dear head. He had no other wish but that; he went away unforced and tearful to his terrible death. Who does not feel that it was natural and right that such kindness should meet such a return?

Now, therefore, I contend that if human benefactions ought to shame and conquer the evil heart, much more—a thousandfold more—ought God's love to melt us into contrition. Who is like unto the Lord our God? And what goodness is like his goodness, that we should persist in levity and unthankfulness? If man's kindness constrains us into affection, surely God's longsuffering leadeth us to repentance.

We are ready now, doubtless, for the conclusion that to continue impenitent is to pour contempt on God and his infinite mercy.

So doing, we impeach his character for truth and faithfulness; not in words, of course, but virtually.

To live in the very presence of an emphatic and often-repeated declaration as if it had not been made is really to deny its truth. If you and I were about to embark in a steamer for some distant port, and an eminent engineer should stop us and say, "Beware of that vessel! I inspected her yesterday, and her boiler is corroded and ready to burst; her shaft is flawed and must soon break; her chief engineer is a sot:" if we should look him blandly in the face while he spoke, and then press on into the doomed ship, would he not be justly offended, as though we had flatly contradicted him? Would he not feel that we had earned our fate?

Just so do we discredit the truth of God when we go on in sin and self-indulgence, in obstinate security, precisely as if he had not warned us. He has declared that the wages of sin is death; that the soul that sinneth it shall die; that, if we turn not, he hath bent his bow and made it ready, and his arrows shall be sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment. And now, if you and I treat sin lightly, we say he will *not* slay us for such small offences; we turn away in silence from all his warnings; we declare we shall not surely die:—just that style of contradiction which insults most grossly.

But suppose our friend the engineer should proceed thus:—"This ship is doomed; the very first

strain upon her will leave her helpless in the sea : but here is a vessel I have equipped for this very voyage. Science has done its utmost for her strength and speed ; her stores are the choicest, her officers the flower of the navy. Go in her and I promise you safety and success ; I ask it as a favour, even, so greatly do I desire to save you." Suppose, I say, he should urge us thus, and we should push impatiently past him into the painted wreck we had chosen : how would it look to us in the day of storm and peril ? Should we not accuse ourselves of insolence as well as folly ?

And what has God said to us ? " Incline your ear and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David ; " " the righteous shall enter into life eternal. " Now, if we hearken to his voice, if we feel the deep truth of every one of his words, if we live by them, well and good ; we honour the faithfulness of God. If not, we may make our professions of respect as loud as a trumpet if we please, but our actions more loudly proclaim our utter skepticism. Remember, though we deny him, yet he abideth faithful ; he may deny us, but he cannot deny himself : yet the hearts and lives of the impenitent disclaim all faith in him, and put an open outrage on Almighty God.

We throw contempt on him, again, by showing

entire indifference to his will. And here, as we cannot canvass the whole vast subject, look with me at one fact. God has publicly and continually expressed his earnest desire to win our *affections*; he asks, above all things, to be loved. Like every other true benefactor, one great aim of all his kindness is to win our esteem and trust. If he presses repentance on us, it is, so far as he is concerned, for this end:—that we might set our hearts on him.

What now is the uppermost feeling about repentance in the mind of the impenitent, ay, and of the convicted sinner too? Is there any quick and generous return of God's good-will? Any glad acknowledgment of his bounty? Any grateful devotion to him? Ah, no; it is the *way to be saved*! If we do not repent we cannot escape the eternal burnings! God's wishes and feelings are of small concern to the sinner. Only give him safety, and he asks no more!

Once more: in our impenitence we slight or forget the tremendous sacrifices God has made for us. Everybody knows the story of Sir Philip Sydney wounded and dying in his tent, and thirsting long before any water could be had. When at last a little cupfull was brought, he alone saw the fainting soldier's eye following so wishfully the hand that bore it. "Give it," he said, "to that poor fellow: he needs it more than I." Imagine, now, those two

restored to health. Suppose the soldier, instead of being bound to his general by a love stronger than death, to show an utter disregard of him, seeking him and caring for him only when he hoped to gain something from him,—for the rest, scornfully breaking his commands and thwarting every wish of his noble benefactor, to suit his own convenience or his whim: is there a finger so spiritless as not to point at him, or a tongue so cowardly as not to load him with reproaches?

But what is this to God's kindness to us? Christ bore for us this very pain of thirst, and it was only one of a thousand pangs. How do we treat him, we who will not repent? Just as I supposed that soldier to treat Sydney; though these sufferings were to those but as a cup of cold water to a fiery ocean. We forget and disobey and grieve and dishonour him just as long as we dare. If a smitten conscience, or a sharp distress, or death impending, compels us to seek help, then we are found at his feet, and only then. Returning peace or health breaks the unwelcome bond and sets us free to forsake God, and straightway he is forsaken. Thus, instead of serving God, we try to *use* him,—make his goodness and longsuffering the anodyne for our fears, the pillow for our uneasy heads.

But, while we take advantage of his generosity, and that to the utmost, we yield nothing to his wish,

nothing to his command, nothing to his entreaty. His utmost eloquence and love and sacrifice can charm from us nothing but—"Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Is Paul's word too strong? Is not this "despising?"

I may be expected to say something here of the danger in which they stand who thus condemn the almighty and jealous God; but I cannot. I have not the heart to do it. It is a mad, a tremendous peril,—nothing less, as Job said, than "stretching out the hand against God, and strengthening himself against the Almighty; running upon the thick bosses of Jehovah's buckler." But another thought absorbs me. It is the exceeding shamefulness of such ingratitude. This is one of the offences which men agree to visit with inextinguishable blame. Nothing is more universally hated, nothing does society more surely avenge, than ingratitude to human benefactors. Yet in this very sin,—only towards God, the perfect and glorious Friend, instead of man,—in this very sin live all the impenitent!

But let Jehovah present his own plea. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me! Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity! They have for-

saken Jehovah, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they are gone away backward."

"Cast away from you all your transgressions; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn and live."

And thus, once more, dear friends, God has pleaded his own cause with you. Once more, in his wonderful forbearance, he stands before you and you reason together. His goodness leadeth to repentance: that is the whole stress and purpose of it. Shall it prevail? Consider well, consider solemnly, how you will treat this kind appeal, so hard to make, so easy to reject. It may be God's last appeal. Word of grace may never, never enter your ear again. Will you respect him in his majesty and awfulness bent down to mercy for your sake? Will you believe his gracious promises and yield him your heart? Shall you be found this day, this night, at the foot of the cross? Or "despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?" Despisest thou?

CHAPTER VI.

HARDENING THE HEART.

THERE is something very startling to a thoughtful reader of the book of Proverbs in the sudden way in which, among prudent maxims and wise sayings of all sorts, you come right upon a text speaking the most purely religious truths in almost the same tone. The danger of being security for one's friend, the danger of hearkening to the voice of licentious temptation, and the danger of hardening the heart against God's warnings, are pointed out in the same terse and pungent language, and often in the same paragraph and the same strain. It can hardly fail of suggesting to such a reader that it is the same wisdom that is counselling us about all these things, the same experience that recognises the mischief of all these follies, and that they commend themselves to us from the same authority.

So surely, therefore, as the merchant and man of business will confess the rightness of the prudential maxims, and the profoundest moralist admire these precepts of virtue, so surely will man's heart—either when it has learned spiritual wisdom or when it has

been taught by a terrible experience—own the truth of this solemn warning:—"He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy:" Prov. xxix. 1. The sinner who perseveres in his impenitence, though faithfully warned, will at last be cut off at once and forever.

How are sinners reprov'd? Whatever calls them to serious thought about their souls and religion deserves that name. Their very position as offenders against God's law makes every thing a reproof which shows them their true condition, and the urgent necessity of a new character and nature.

Sinners are reprov'd by their own consciences. Nothing is a greater proof of God's goodness than this:—that in the very heart of man's corruption he has planted such a thing as conscience, and given it such a tough, enduring life. Man does sometimes bury it so deep that its voice is silenced for a while; he accustoms it to such violence that its power of feeling seems destroyed: but only for a time. Her thunders "sometimes sleep and sometimes roar."

They are often wakened by the thought of some particular sin. You show some levity in the house of God: perhaps, while Christians are partaking of the Lord's supper, you talk, or smile, or encourage

some evil thought. All at once it flashes on you, what an aggravated offence this is; how your God is employing with you the very strongest, tenderest, sacredest means of grace, and you are actually defying them all; that these are your Saviour's gifts, and you are pouring contempt upon them all; that this is the chosen opportunity of the Holy Spirit, and you are setting him at nought. Conscience urges these thoughts upon you, and you confess that you are guilty.

Or perhaps it is some passion that has suddenly broken through the restraints with which you commonly curb it. A parent, a friend, a child, a servant, has crossed your will in some way, and you do some passionate thing, speak violently, perhaps profanely. Again you are convicted by your own conscience: you have sinned against God.

In some such way conscience is often roused to reprove the sinner; and, having begun to speak, it launches out from that particular charge, reminds you of one sin after another, tells you of those vows you have made and broken, of the many prayers offered for you, of the great privileges you enjoy; accuses you of ingratitude and ungodliness.

But there is another way. There often springs up in the sinner's breast a vague disquietude, a discontent with himself and all that he does and is. He almost unconsciously finds fault with himself,

and especially with those parts of his character which men praise. When they talk of his wit, his generosity, his good temper, his social virtues of various kinds, it awakens a bitterness and a self-disgust that surprises himself. His pleasures seem to have worn out. He wonders no more at the magnificence and wisdom of the world, but at its folly, its emptiness, its misery. He marvels at the change in himself, and doubts whereto it will grow. Perhaps it is some strange sickness coming on? Perhaps the first stealthy approach of insanity? No, poor sinner, it is conscience; it is the half-enlightened, deep-seated *sense of sin* growing on you, stripping away the painted trappings of life and showing you the godless heart that lies behind your graces and virtues and poisons them all. Your conscience is reproving you.

Sinners are reproved by preaching. This is sometimes the reason why faithful ministers are unpopular: they do not "comfort" sinners. God has promised to bless the plain and patient speaking of his truth to men:—"It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." He does bless it. Many who have been cherishing some false excuse in their hearts have seen it exposed and have been undeceived in the courts of the Lord's house. Many who have wandered in darkness, convicted of sin and unable to find a Saviour,

have been taught by their pastor and have there found the Lord Jesus mighty to save.

So, also, sinners are often reprov'd from the pulpit. Some earnest word reaches their consciences; something that is said fits their case or describes their sin. For the faithful minister preaches from the Bible, and the Bible is the word of Him who "searcheth the hearts:" thus, all the various forms of impenitence and unbelief are spoken of there, and sooner or later each man's wound will be touched. He may try to shake it off; he may succeed in that attempt: but he has been "reprov'd." Nothing can alter or blot out that fact. Oh, my reader, years of remorse, an eternity of anguish, cannot change it!

Sinners are often reprov'd by faithful words in private. Not as often as they should be: there is a sad and sinful cowardice in Christians about this duty. I know they feel their weakness and ignorance in religious matters, but what right have they to be weak and ignorant here? They,—the children of a king, dwelling in his family, furnished with his word, admitted at a moment's notice into his presence to get wisdom or help,—they unable to advise or instruct in heavenly things? Shame on them! How dare they neglect their Bibles and leave this most important of all arts unstudied and unknown, to be better farmers, or merchants, or politicians?

God will bring them into judgment for this sin. *He does.* Their children and their companions grow up in hopeless ignorance of the way of salvation and “perish for lack of knowledge.” Even when they are taught in other ways, as from the pulpit or in the Sunday-school, they remain unimpressed because of the indifference and silence about personal religion at home. There is no excuse for any man or woman, who has mind enough to manage common worldly affairs, being unable to point a dying sinner to the cross. This is not man’s opinion. It is God’s word:—“Let him that heareth say, Come!”

But to return. Sinners are at times thus reformed. Perhaps their pastor himself has sought them out, or taken a favourable opportunity as it occurred, and affectionately warned them of their danger. He has told them, in private as well as from the pulpit, the wickedness of being without God and without faith in Jesus Christ. He has prayed them to be reconciled to God and to flee from the wrath to come. He has told them of a Saviour’s love, of his readiness to forgive, and of the awful peril of delay. He has sought to win their confidence, that they might frankly tell him their difficulties and doubts. If in any way he could wisely do it, he has kneeled with them in prayer, that they might come to pray. He has pleaded for

them in secret with agony of earnestness and groanings that cannot be uttered.

Or perhaps some other friend, driven on by anxiety for them and pity for their immortal souls, has broken through the natural reserve we feel, and the restraints of false shame, and done a Christian's duty by them, as did that faithful old man who rode some miles to an infidel's house to tell him he was "greatly concerned for his salvation," though he could tell him nothing more; and God blessed that simple word and saved that soul. The kind accent reaches the heart or the conscience, and again the sinner is "reproved."

He is often reproved by Providence. Sometimes an escape from impending trouble of some kind awakens the sense of God's goodness, and that leads him to thought. He remembers how great care he has needed and received, how many dangers he has passed through in safety, how many have fallen and been destroyed where he has lived, and lived in sin. He considers that a wise God cannot have thus regarded and preserved him without a purpose; that a holy and unerring eye is on him, which notes how he receives these favours and how he lives after them, that a strict account of them all will be exacted at the last. God's goodness thus reproves him.

But often it is God's severity that gives the

needed reproof. Thrown down, and held down, upon a bed of pain, and thus reminded of God's anger, he is silently confronted with death. He sees the end of his probation perhaps draw very near; he can count upon his fingers the days, the hours, that probably remain to him of life. He looks back upon the opportunities he had in health, remembers how carelessly he used them as they fled,—how like a spendthrift he played with his wealth till it slipped from his hand into the all-devouring gulf. Conscience, that slept before, thunders now, and his heart trembles.

Often men's plans are broken up and their labours made fruitless by some calamity. A whole year's toil is wasted by a single storm,—so much of life and strength and hope thrown away! A ship is wrecked; the price of some article suddenly rises or falls; a trusted agent deceives and robs him. He is thus reminded that God will not always chide gently and speak affectionately; that he is not always indulgent and mild. Again the danger of sin stands out before him; the long-neglected warning is listened to at last; he is reproved for sin.

Or his hand is taken by an unseen and terrible Being and he is led to the grave's edge to see some dear one "buried out of his sight." The light of his home is put out,—quenched in tears or blood;

some face and voice, that was as constant there as sunshine in the heavens, is gone forever. Through that narrow gate all his treasures are carried—whither? He himself must lie down thus in his turn and be borne away—where? Shall he go blind-fold, struggling against the Almighty, frenzied with terror, screaming out mingled blasphemy and prayer? Or shall he smile at his Father's word, commit his soul to his Father's keeping, and pass gently and sweetly to his Father's home? Thus also is the sinner reproved.

It is all-important to remember that, though reproof comes to the sinner in these different ways, there is but one great Reprover in them all,—the Holy Spirit. All the events of life would fail to touch man's heart or arouse his conscience, if that patient and mighty Friend were not at hand to urge the arrow through his armour into the shrinking flesh. However it come, therefore, it is his reproof men regard and his they despise.

How do men thus reproved harden their necks? The figure is a very natural and graphic one to express the stiffening one's self to resist an influence to which he ought to bend. The reproofs of the Holy Spirit ought to bring us low before the mercy-seat, kneeling in humble prayer, our eyes cast down in self-accusation and shame, ready to be rebuked and chastened and led according to his will. He

who for any reason or in any way does not take that attitude before him is hardening his neck.

Many reject God's mercy by simple delay. They never think enough about it to have a definite plan for or against religion; they merely admit its importance and intend to seek it at some time. And as it presses on them disagreeably, giving pain and shame and blunting the pleasures of life, they instinctively remit it to that "some time" when it shall prove a pleasant task to repent and return unto the Lord,—their God! Do you tell them they are wicked? They know it; and they mean to be better. That God is angry with them? Yes; but they will seek the Saviour. That life is precarious? No doubt; but long before death approaches they expect to be Christians. That their sin is increasing every day? But it would be impious to limit the mercy of God.

They have no other plan or intention about it than to stave off what is unpleasant now,—to put off the evil day. Ah, how different from God's silent steadfastness! He *hath appointed* a day wherein to judge the world; and, though they break their promises, be sure he will keep his!

Such delays are more common than men will venture to believe. There is a sea of rebellion in every impenitent heart that may swell with fury and cast up mire and dirt any hour. It is never safe to think

that any sin is impossible to any sinner. Only let the question of submission or rebellion fairly come before them, and the most amiable and kind are ready to despise reproof, to harden their neck, and to grieve away the Holy Spirit.

The result of this foolish and wicked delay is not merely that it breaks the power of an appeal when it is made, but that it accustoms the ear and the heart to hear it without action and soon without feeling. The soul is *dead* in sins, and the Holy Spirit is grieved away.

Another way of hardening the neck is by excuses : sometimes excuses for not repenting now, sometimes for not doing it at all. Perhaps the sinner has some pleasure in view which will certainly distract his thoughts if he engages in it ; and he feels that it would be mockery to enter on the search for religion now and ask God's blessing on it when he intends to frustrate it all by this coming self-indulgence. It would be a mockery ; but, instead of concluding that therefore the dangerous pleasure must be given up, the hardener of his heart puts off religion !

It is almost impossible to believe beforehand that a human heart can be so daring in its wilfulness : yet it is even so. It is not rare to hear from the lips of the young language like this :—"It is too hard to ask me to give up my pleasures now : my

mind is made up to taste them first; afterwards I will try religion. I know the risk I run; I know the sin I commit; but I am determined." I saw a young friend's head bent down once in sorrow for her sins, almost persuaded to be a Christian. She resolved at last to attend the next week's ball and to postpone religion till that was over. That is several years ago; and she walks in unbelief and darkness still.

Another has business engagements: he has just settled in life, or is just about to do so; he has bought some property that must be closely looked after; he is in temporary difficulty and must fight his way through; and he prays us to have him excused. Another is young; he pleads his warm blood, the novelty and sweetness of life's pleasures, the long life before him making the sacrifice so great; we must wait—why do I say "we"? God must wait—till the cross is worn a little lighter and sinful life is a little less delightful; while his neighbour pleads middle age and business just as urgently as he pleads youth and pleasure. So sickness and health, adversity, prosperity, any thing, *nothing*, is reason enough for not seeking a Saviour now.

The other class of excuses is really, though half-unconsciously, designed to break the force of religious obligation *altogether*. One sinner protests,

“I cannot feel; my feelings are not under my own control.” Of course, this is no excuse at all, unless it means, “The impossibility is of such a kind as exonerates me from all blame for not feeling; you ought not to make such an appeal to me:” otherwise it is not an excuse, but a confession. Another, in the same strain, declares he cannot repent; a third reminds us that only the Holy Spirit can change his heart. Now, these excuses, though each contains a truth, *are not believed by those who use them*. If they really felt that they could not save themselves but must seek help from One who is mighty to save, their tone would be very different. They only give it that half-belief which stills their uneasy consciences, breaks the force of the heavenly reproof, and grieves away the Holy Spirit. *

But there are far more subtle ways of gaining the same end than these. One of them is to establish a righteousness of our own. The sinner, in this case, admits his past sin and the need of repentance and the truth and beauty of the gospel; but there lies hidden in him a secret hope and purpose to be *good enough to be saved*. He will so abound in prayers and tears, in reading of the Bible and consistent life, in good words and works and thoughts, that his sins and his iniquities shall be remembered no more. Now, when it is considered how deeply vile man’s heart is, how every fibre of his moral

nature is stained black before God, how he cannot govern his thoughts and feelings or change the character of one action, can any thing look more fruitless, obstinate and blind, than this self-righteousness? Yet many a sinner contrives to live in that very state and to mislead conscience by that very device till his convictions pass away. He has hardened his neck and grieved away the Holy Spirit.

When every other device has failed, it remains to make a false profession. Not false in the sense of a gross hypocrisy to deceive men, but false in this sense:—that it is self-deceiving, insincere, intended by a wicked heart to prevent repentance; so false that temptation, danger, or the approach of death, suffices to expose the cheat and leave the soul in absolute despair.

Men go through an imitation of Christian experience; willingly mistake one feeling and state of mind for another; persuade themselves into a hope that the work is done when it is hardly begun; reconcile themselves to their condition by giving it a name which does not belong to it; thank God for a salvation they may never, never taste! All because a wicked heart turns them aside; because they have not prayed earnestly and humbly as they ought for help from on high; because they have been more anxious to escape pain and punishment than sin.

Now, flattering themselves that the danger is past, they urge their doubting, fearful, self-accusing spirits to be at ease, and call the effort—faith. They often complete the delusion by making a public profession; silence all questions by that fact; go down to the grave with all their impenitence and mockery of God upon their heads! Thus, also, many a sinner, having been often reproved, hardeneth his neck and grieves away the Holy Spirit.*

“He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck *shall suddenly be destroyed.*” It is not necessary to this sudden destruction that a man should be struck down in the bloom of his youth or the vigour of health and manhood by some swift judgment, as by a thunderbolt. It is enough if he is so taken away as to cut off all hope of escape, all chance of forgiveness. It is enough if the unconquered pride of his heart wakes up and he refuses to confess his fatal error or to seek pardon from God. It is enough if the half-uttered prayer dies on his palsied lips,—palsied with terror or despair. It is enough if, while the failing voice repeats its aimless cry for, “mercy,” reason be unseated by pain and fear,—driven mad by the growing thunder of the Judg-

* “Then I saw, and behold, there was a way back to hell, even from the gate of heaven.”—BUNYAN.

ment. His agony anticipates the coming of the Son of man; he hears the awful sentence, "Depart!" and goes down "to his place."

Of how many that have sat with us in God's house is this the story! They too were more or less faithfully "reproved." The pulpit was not silent about their guilt; friends warned them; God spoke to them. But they thought they had time enough; that we were needlessly alarmed, perhaps officious; that they might safely wait a little—just a little—longer. So they hardened their necks.

Where are they now? Go ask the monuments that dare speak only of the past! Ask that secret witness in your heart that throbs with a dull and sickening pain at the very question! Oh that the people were wise!—that they understood this!—that they would consider their latter end!

It is added that this sudden destruction shall also be "without remedy." It is only one of many express declarations that the punishment of the wicked *shall be eternal*. If it would be "better for a man that he had never been born" than to fall into that perdition,—if it is to be an "everlasting destruction,"—if it is to endure as long as the salvation of God's people endures, even "forever and ever," without hope and without remedy,—must it not be eternal?

Can there be a more suicidal course than to palter with these terms and pare them down in the vain hope that some distant age will bring impunity for sin? My dear reader, *sin itself is the death you have to dread*. When you have gone to a world where the blood of Christ does not cleanse from sin, nor God's Spirit strive with hardened man, nor a Saviour's intercessions rise, the sin will be incurable and the death eternal.

In conclusion, observe that, by telling us what is so dangerous, the Scripture also tells us what is safe. There is a posture of impenitent man, as we have seen, which invites destruction. It is standing before a jealous God with stiff neck and hardened heart; continuing life's plans and pleasures in utter disregard of him; breaking his law, slighting his gospel, setting at nought his Son, resisting his Holy Spirit. These four things are done by every sinner who does not regard reproofs and turn unto the Lord.

Can you imagine any thing more horrible than this attitude? This puny creature of a day practically defying the Almighty and braving his fiercest wrath; going on with his little affairs as though nothing were the matter; bidding his frightened heart be still; keeping his place of guilt,—though God

strike down sinners at his right hand and his left—not for principle's sake, but in sheer wilfulness and hardness; putting aside the great Jehovah himself, when (as it were) he thrusts himself on him to warn and save; putting him aside with firm or petulant hand, and, without so much as a trembling voice, bidding HIM go his way for this time!

But there is an attitude to which God invites us. It is the softened heart, the listening ear, the child-like relenting after disobedience and passion; it is yearning for a Father's love; it is listening for his gracious word; it is abandoning every thing that separates us from him; it is owning our utter unworthiness and asking pardon for Jesus' sake. O lost sinner, when *that* hand is held out to you for reconciliation, when *that* eye is looking wistfully in your face to see it soften and weep, when *that* ear is listening for one word of prayer, *can* you deny him? Will you harden your heart and refuse his love?

Yet once more has he called you; you have been reproved once more. You may forget it, but God never will!—never! Life may run smoothly away to its end; warning and fear may be spared you henceforth; under some strong delusion you may even close your eyes in death in apparent peace. But God has not forgotten or changed or relented:

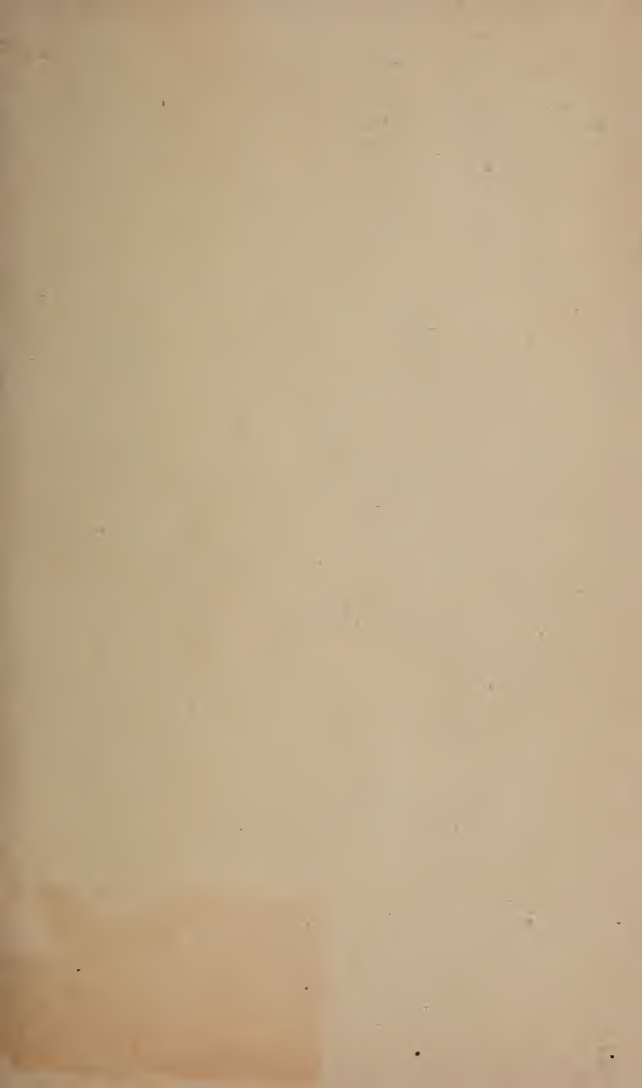
one single, unalterable word will boom out of the darkness and all will be over. Oh, eternity! eternity! The blackness of darkness FOREVER! "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!"

My friend, it is yet called TO-DAY. "TO-DAY, IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART "

THE END.

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